

## Thinking Strategically about Tactics

Regardless of who is in office, we have a responsibility as constituents to continue to stay engaged in the decisions our elected representatives make. We must hold them accountable to what's in our best interests—focusing their policymaking on good jobs, affordable health care, quality education, secure retirement and corporate accountability.

We do that by making sure our elected officials are hearing from us. The good (exciting, inspiring) news is that there are so many tactics to make our voices heard. We can make phone calls! Write letters! Hold rallies! Hold sit-ins! As long as we are creative and lead with our hearts, the possibilities are endless.

In order to be as effective as possible, we must think strategically about our tactics. Each tactic has a different strategic value. Choose a tactic that fits the goals and timeline of your campaign.

### Common Tactics

Following are some common tactics. They each have their own strategic value, benefits and drawbacks.

#### Letters to the Editor

Elected officials and staffers monitor newspapers in their districts to find out what issues are gaining local attention. The letter to the editor (LTE) section is extremely valuable because it is a chance to connect a personal story to an issue in the news, as well as a way to call on your elected official to take an action in the public arena. **LTEs are strategic when we need to highlight personal stories, combat an unfair representation of the issue in the news, publicly demand action by an elected official, or rally community members to action.**

A well-written letter to the editor shares our economic justice message widely and can generate many responses from like-minded folks within the community. A downside is that there's no guarantee our letters will be published and there can be a significant lag between submission and publication, meaning it's not the best action for urgent issues.

#### Calls to an Elected Official

Generating calls to an official's office is a quick and easy way to get a lot of attention very quickly. **This action is particularly useful for urgent issues, like when a piece of legislation is coming up for a vote.** Because calls are a relatively simple action, they don't carry quite as much weight as letters with legislators, and you need a higher number of them to make an impact.

## Letters to an Elected Official

Personal, handwritten letters send a strong statement to legislators because they're a relatively time-consuming action. **Letters can demonstrate a depth of understanding about the issue and a personal connection that isn't always achieved a via phone call or email.** Letters also give legislators something tangible to show colleagues, clearly indicating how much support a given position has.

To be effective, letters should be personal and unique.

## Petitions

Petitions demonstrate support or opposition to an issue in their sheer numbers. Petitions are a clear indicator on where constituents stand on an issue, but do not allow for a personal story or a depth of understanding. **Petitions are most effective when targeting elected officials who won their elections by small margins and who know that they must keep and build their support in their district.**

## Lobby Visits

Sitting down in person with an elected official is quite impactful. **It allows you to begin building a relationship with your local representatives and can be an opportunity to convey your passion, understanding, and dedication to an issue.** Because these meetings are a big time commitment, they can be difficult to schedule, and you may only get one per issue.

## Earned Media Events

**Earned media events like rallies or press conferences are strategic for bringing attention to your issue, or publicly demanding action from your elected official.** They are also fun and can help galvanize your supporters and act as a low bar of participation for folks just starting to get involved (every earned media event needs attendees). Earned media events can take a little while to plan, and the media is notoriously fickle, so you might not get any coverage (though you should always promote your own event on social media).

## Planning Your Actions

Think through which action or actions you want to take. Considerations could include:

- **How much time do you have before the elected official will be taking action?** If something is coming up for a vote within the next week or so, you may only have time to

make a call yourself and convince a couple others to as well. If you have several weeks, you may want to try collecting a couple dozen letters or organizing a lobby visit.

- **How much do you know about the position of the elected official you're trying to influence? If you're unsure of an elected official's position on an issue, you could try calling to ask.** Then if you find out they're in opposition, you could write a letter to the editor to energize like-minded community members to take action as well. **If you know your elected official supports your position, you could schedule a lobby visit with them to find out how you can help their efforts.** Perhaps it would be helpful to do a letter-writing campaign so your representative can have a stack of letters to demonstrate to their colleagues how much support your position has.

### **Getting Others Involved**

**While it's always valuable to register your opinion with your legislator using any of the actions listed above, you can have an outsized impact by coordinating actions with others in your community.** Instead of just you making one phone call, having five of your co-workers make a call sends a much stronger message.

Not only is it more impactful to have many people contact them with the same message, but by coordinating your delivery of the actions, you can increase their impact. Think about what the receiving experience will be for the elected official you'd like to influence. By calling in back to back, you know that the representative's phone will be ringing off the hook, getting the attention of their staffers. The same goes for sending letters. Instead of just asking people you know to send in letters too, collect them all. That way you can stage a delivery of a big stack of letters all at once, or plan to send the elected official a couple of letters every day leading up to a big vote.